**Inspire, Engage, Transform: Ourselves,**

**Our Community, Our Future**

**The Conceptual Framework for Professional Education Programs at Western Carolina University**

**The 2011-2012 Conceptual Framework Committee:**

Dr. William Dee Nichols, Head of the School of Teaching and Learning, Professor, Chair

Dr. Dan Grube, Associate Dean of the College of Education and Allied Professions

Dr. Bob Beaudet, Associate Professor, Health and P.E., School of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Frederick Buskey, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Human Services

Dr. Kefyn Catley, Professor, Biology, Secondary Education, Arts and Sciences

Dr. Lori Caudle, Assistant Professor, Birth through Kindergarten, Human Services

Dr. Ellie Hilty, Associate Professor, Curriculum and Instruction, School of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Kathleen Jorissen, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Human Services

Dr. Brian Lawrence, Director of Field Experiences, Clinical Assistant Professor

Dr. Sarah Meltzer, Assistant Professor, Secondary Education, School of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Tom Oren, Associate Professor, Special Education, School of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Lisen Roberts, Associate Professor, Counseling, Human Services

Dr. Kelly Tracy, Assistant Professor, Literacy, School of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Lori Unruh, Associate Professor, Psychology

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***Inspire, Engage, Transform: Ourselves, Our Community, Our Future***

**The Conceptual Framework of Professional Education Programs at Western Carolina University**

**2012**

**Executive Summary of the Conceptual Framework**

**Introduction:**

The conceptual framework for the professional education programs at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina includes five elements: The mission and vision of the University and the College; the philosophy, purposes, and goals of the Professional Education Unit; the knowledge bases that inform the conceptual framework; the candidate proficiencies developed through our programs; and the system of assessment by which we document candidates’ attainment of those proficiencies and the operation of the College as a whole.

* The first element, the vision and mission of the University and the Professional Education Unit, describes the foundational values and goals that inform and guide the College of Education and Allied professions and serves as the foundation for our Conceptual Framework. These core values of an engaged university guide our educational decisions and represent our shared beliefs about teaching and learning. Our values, mission, vision and beliefs are summarized in our chosen theme for the conceptual framework: **Inspire, engage, transform: Ourselves, our community, our future.**
* The second element describes the philosophy of the professional education programs at Western Carolina University.
* The third element describes the educational research and theoretical bases that have informed the development of our conceptual framework.
* The fourth element describes the proficiencies and dispositions we expect all teacher candidates to achieve upon completion of their professional preparation programs at Western Carolina University. These are aligned with state, national, and professional standards.
* The final element describes the structure of our programs and system for evaluating candidate progress and unit effectiveness.

The mission of the professional education programs at Western Carolina University is to prepare highly effective and ethical graduates that are inspired to be lifelong learners, engaged in the community, and empowered to become leaders who strive to transform the future. Professional education programs at WCU include preparation programs for teachers, administrators, counselors, school psychologists, and child and family development professionals at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels.

**Preface: Development of the Conceptual Framework**

The Conceptual Framework Committee began the process of developing a new conceptual framework by first examining the document that was currently guiding the professional education programs at WCU. This document stated that the goals that guide Western Carolina University candidates during the course of their education programs are grounded in collaboration with our B-12 partners in the region and focus on providing quality field experiences that are designed to foster the development of candidates’ dispositions, knowledge and skills.

The foundation of this document was based on assisting our candidates to use their knowledge of both human development and their disciplines to effectively teach all pupils to solve problems. This value is still relevant to our new conceptual framework. We still believe that, in order to be an effective professional candidate, you must have a thorough understanding of learner development. We continue to recognize the importance of our candidates full understanding of their chosen disciplines and the content associated with each of the professional disciplines of our unit. Without a thorough knowledge of learner development and content knowledge related to the discipline, candidates cannot effectively provide responsive instruction to meet the unique needs of all learners. In addition, for professional candidates to be successful in 21st Century learning it is imperative to teach learners to be critical problem solvers, who will be persistent with the learning task and, when needed, work collaboratively to creatively solve problems.

Our prior document also recognized the importance of modeling collaborative, caring, and intellectually stimulating learning communities so that our candidates could create learning environments for all students that encouraged the thoughtful use of technology, inspired curiosity, fostered motivation, and promoted achievement of rigorous state and professional standards. These values and dispositions also remain current and relevant in our revised document.

Our vision continues to reinforce that we strive to develop professional candidates who possess the following characteristics and behaviors: passion, lifelong learning, genuine care about all students, knowledge of human development and their disciplines, an effective range of instructional skills including a familiarity with technology, and an expectation of high achievement in their students. Our candidates will work to make learning and school pleasurable, joyful and thoughtful. This vision is shared, articulated, and supported throughout our curricula, in clinical and service experiences, and in the formative and summative assessments.

While all of these values remain relevant today, the committee selected to envision our new conceptual framework document with a stronger focus on leadership and the promotion of educating the whole learner by maintaining and promoting healthy lifestyles and the development of global citizens.

The conceptual framework committee embraced Western Carolina University’s commitment to engagement and felt that candidate leadership through service is a unique strength of Western Carolina University graduates. Western’s vision to “be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a regionally engaged university” provided the context for us to develop our conceptual framework and examine our efforts in the professional education strand. We realize that, in order to prepare candidates to meet the professional education standards, they must begin with a thorough understanding of the standards that define our professions. By acquiring this knowledge, our candidates will see beyond the rudiments of the educational process and embrace a larger goal that seeks out opportunities for growth as individuals.

We are dedicated to preparing candidates who aspire to make a difference in both the lives of learners and the culture of educational organizations. To do so, we embrace the power of community and the process of collaboration.

The faculty in the College of Education and Allied Professions understand the importance of working collaboratively to accomplish the goals and dispositions of our candidates. As a result collaboration, mutual respect, responsibility, commitment to service, effective communication, proactive creative thinking, and the ability to lead in a civil way are all parts of our current conceptual framework. Our goal is to develop candidates who will exercise their right to speak on academic matters and will challenge each of us to think critically about the quality and integrity of our work. It is our expectation that our candidates will support each other, honor opposing viewpoints, and maintain a constructive environment for the free exchange of ideas. We will remain supportive of each other and work toward maintaining a thriving community of learners.

In creating a culture and a positive environment in which to carry out our conceptual framework goals, we as faculty in the College of Education and Allied Professions have identified the following **Core Values as a guide to our practice**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Caring  Collaboration  Commitment  Community  Competency  Creativity  Digital Literacy  Effective, Responsive Teaching  Engagement  Free Exchange of Ideas  Knowledge of Human Development | Leadership  Lifelong Learning  Pedagogical Content Knowledge  Problem Solving  Professionalism  Reflection  Respect  Responsibility  Service  Wellness |

Based on those core values the task force identified that we want our candidates to Inspire, Engage and Transform themselves, their community, and the future. In order to accomplish these core values we feel our teacher candidates must aspire to the following:

* **advocate for all people; respect diversity and create positive learning environments;**
* **practice and support effective, research-based teaching and learning in contemporary learning environments;**
* **become actively engaging/nurturing healthy, responsive, productive, creative world citizens and problem-solvers;**

**and**

* **make a positive impact beyond the classroom.**

The following goals have been aligned with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and pertain to and help guide our conceptual framework:

**advocate for all people; respect diversity and create positive learning environments;**

* Our candidates will be leaders who are advocates for all learners and have the confidence to explore problems to ask questions and initiate change.
* Our candidates will be prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of students, especially those from marginalized populations through culturally responsive teaching and educational support.
* Our candidates will create a strong community of learners where every learner feels valued and important, especially those who are often disenfranchised.

**practice and support effective, research-based teaching and learning in contemporary learning environments;**

* Our candidates will know how to engage learners using research-based pedagogical content knowledge to create effective learning environments.
* Our candidates will effectively use technology to support instruction, productivity, professional development, and communication with the community (e.g., families, community leaders).
* Our candidates will develop an ability to work through a problem collaboratively, creatively, and with persistence to try multiple approaches to find the most appropriate solution and inspire their learners to do the same.
* Our candidates will use assessment to evaluate learners’ progress and inform practice through reflective self-assessment.

**Become actively engaging/nurturing healthy, responsive, productive, creative world citizens and problem-solvers;**

* Our candidates will understand the importance of physical activity on multiple aspects of human development and academic engagement.
* Our candidates will be creative developers of solutions, active problem solvers, action takers, and innovators.
* Our candidates will be committed to teaching the whole child – cognitive, physical, emotional, and social.

**make a positive impact beyond the classroom**

* Our candidates will understand the importance of engaging in on-going professional development to remain current in the field of education.
* Our candidates will be prepared to collaboratively work together so that teaching is a team effort where no one is left to solve problems in isolation, go without resources, or struggle trying to do the impossible.
* Our candidates will develop a community of learners that appreciates and celebrates diversity in and beyond the boundaries of the school. It is our goal that candidates will break the cycle of exclusion and create learning communities that include all citizens.
* Our candidates will be actively involved in systems-level change based on promoting and assisting school systems in implementing evidence-based educational practices.
* Our candidates will understand the complex nature of family units and will take a strengths-based approach to partnering with parents and families.

**Western Carolina University and Its Institutional Mission and Vision**

Western Carolina University was founded in 1889 to bring higher education and career opportunities to the western region of North Carolina. A member of the University of North Carolina system, WCU now provides an education to more than 9,000 students from 38 states and 32 countries.

The university’s mission is focused on quality education and preparation for responsible citizenship in a changing world. More specifically the mission states that “Western Carolina University creates engaged learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research and service through residential, distance education and international experiences. The university focuses its academic programs, educational outreach, research and creative activities, and cultural activities to improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in the region, state and nation”. Since its founding, WCU has grown in size to become a major cultural, scientific, and educational force in the region and the state—and we’re still growing.

WCU is a campus of the University of North Carolina system, located on approximately 600 acres in the unincorporated town of Cullowhee. The university is the primary provider of higher education in Western North Carolina and enrolls approximately 9,500 students in some 220 undergraduate and 40 graduate programs of study.

The Western Carolina University vision indicates that WCU desires to be nationally recognized as **actively engaged in the economic health of the region**. It will lead and support others in strategies to create a prosperous future for the people it serves. Via selective internal program investments, systematic partnership outreach and thoughtful deployment of capital assets, WCU seeks to nurture an **ever-expanding economy and community of knowledge** in Western North Carolina.

In adopting new roles to support economic growth, WCU continues to embrace fully its roles in strengthening intellectual inquiry, community, social institutions, culture and the arts.

**The College of Education and Allied Profession’s Mission and Vision**

The College of Education and Allied Professions offers programs of study at the baccalaureate, master's, intermediate, and doctoral levels. The primary role of the College of Education and Allied Professions is to prepare educators, counselors, school psychologists, recreation personnel and other human service specialists at both entry and advanced levels. These professionals will staff public elementary, secondary, postsecondary schools, sport and recreation agencies, and other human service organizations in North Carolina and the region beyond. The College fulfills its mission by developing and maintaining a community of scholars that promotes and recognizes good teaching, service, and research. Of these three scholarly activities, providing optimal learning environments for students is most important, followed by service and research.

The College strives to provide leadership and technical assistance for the improvement of teacher preparation and elementary and secondary schooling in North Carolina, the nation, and developing countries. The College is strongly committed to partnering with the public schools in order to educate pre-service teachers to teach all children to high standards, to assist beginning professional educators to be successful and remain in the profession, and to provide quality staff development for career professional educators.

Additional fundamental roles of the College are to serve the liberal studies program of the University and to offer programs and special clinical services that relate closely to the mission of the College and that are needed by its constituencies.

The College fulfills its mission by creating and nourishing a community of learners guided by knowledge, values, and experiences. The guiding principles of the community of learners include: (1) the belief that the best educational decisions are made after adequate reflection and with careful consideration of the interests, experiences and welfare of the persons affected by those decisions; (2) an appreciation of and respect for diversity; and (3) a commitment to fostering the responsible use of technology.

These programs will have a culturally diverse faculty, staff and student body, and the curricula in these programs will be state-of-the-art, fully staffed, and sufficient in kind and number to meet the needs of its clientele. The College's fully accredited programs will receive exemplary status on all pertinent performance reports.

Assessment systems will ensure quality program development which, in turn, will have resulted in high levels of authentic student learning. The programs will have integrated technology including distance learning and web-based courses. Appropriate programs will be recognized for their expertise in rural matters.

The faculty members of the College will be noted for their teaching excellence, concern for individual students, and modeling of the qualities that they attempt to instill in their students. The College will continue to be a leader in providing comprehensive opportunities for traditional and non-traditional students. The College's graduates will be noted for their effectiveness in moving their profession forward, for their ethical behavior, their ability to think critically, and for the positive impact they have on the quality of life for those with whom they come into contact.

The College, through its faculty and staff, will be responsive to the needs and the concerns of the people and agencies located in its service area. To this end, the College will engage effectively in a variety of university and community partnerships that include, among others, the public schools, the College of Arts and Sciences, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching and the Western Region Education Service Alliance and the Education and Research Consortium of North Carolina.

**The Knowledge Base for the Conceptual Framework**

***Inspire, Engage, Transform: Ourselves, Our Community, Our Future***

The mission of the professional education programs at Western Carolina University is to graduate empowered educators, who through their leadership can advocate for all learners and become agents for change and continual improvement. In order to develop candidates as leaders, they first need to be inspired learners themselves. In order to lead, our graduates need to be self motivated, goal oriented learners who are truly inspired to become intellectuals themselves. Second, on this journey toward educator as leader, our candidates need to be engaged learners who are committed to the stewardship of place and dedicate themselves toward service to the community and region. Finally, in order to develop graduates who are prepared to enter the profession willing to lead through service and action and make a positive impact on children, youth, families, communities and schools we want to instill in our candidates that they have the power to transform learning and, in essence, the future itself. This journey into professional educator means:

1. Becoming an **inspired** learner who understands the significance of becoming educated themselves and engaging in exploration to determine the types of knowledge, including content, pedagogy, reflection, and learner development, that effective educators and support personnel need in order to inspire others to learn.
2. Becoming **engaged** and committed to service in the community and the region. Western Carolina University’s classification as an engaged university fits perfectly with this aspiration and WCU leads the country in service projects and undergraduate research.
3. Developing an understanding of the commitment it takes to **transform** the future of education and develop global citizens who will become agents for change and stand up for their convictions about teaching and learning.

The Conceptual Framework of the Professional Education Programs at Western Carolina University provides direction for programs, teaching, courses, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. The candidates of the Professional Education Program at WCU must demonstrate that they are **inspired** learners who are committed to acquiring the knowledge base that is essential for educators; **engaged** learners who are committed to service and connected and grounded in the community; and developing leaders who are willing to **transform** education for all 21st Century learners. To reach this end our candidates will begin with inspiration and a commitment to developing the knowledge base to provide effective instruction and other educational services that will respond to the diverse needs of all learners. Developing this knowledge base is essential when learning to collaborate with others and to engage in ongoing professional development that will lead to engagement and transformative education. Professional educators must acquire a broad knowledge base as well as more specialized content and pedagogical knowledge of their chosen discipline. They must know and understand learners and their context as well as policies, laws, standards and current issues that face families, schools and communities. In order to best acquire this foundational base of knowledge and understanding our candidates need to be **inspired** self-regulated learners who value and are committed to lifelong learning.

In order to facilitate the development of inspired, engaged and transformative learners the candidates of Western Carolina University must enhance their conceptual knowledge regarding their chosen profession. This institution affirms this classical function of higher education by preserving, generating, transmitting, applying, synthesizing and evaluating knowledge and understanding in order to support the spirit of open inquiry and critical thinking. Our goal is to have inspired candidates who are self-motivated and are able to form, articulate, and act upon reasoned decisions in their personal, civic, and professional lives. In accordance with the College’s commitment to nurturing strong partnerships with the public schools in order to educate pre-service teachers to teach all learners to high standards it is essential that our candidates have a broad knowledge base as well as a more specialized knowledge base of their chosen area. We refer to this development and enhancement of this knowledge base as Pedagogical Content Knowledge.

In order for candidates to increase their pedagogical content knowledge and inspire to improve themselves, they must examine their existing knowledge and beliefs. We believe that one's existing knowledge is the foundation of all future learning. Existing knowledge that a learner brings to any situation serves as the basis for association with all new information (Alexander, Schallert, & Hare, 1991). We feel that all previous experiences color and filter all new experiences (Alexander & Murphy, 1995). In essence we believe the knowledge base is the total of all an individual knows and believes. The knowledge base is not constructed solely of factual, explicit knowledge, or schooled content stored and organized in memory, but is integrated with the tacit knowledge the learner already possesses, which is often acquired from nonacademic sociocultural experiences (Gardner, 1991; Gee, 1988). This integration between the knower and the known (Fenstermacher, 1994) is the basis for our belief that higher levels of learning and acquisition of knowledge will be best obtained through quality experiences, which we provide through various instructional medias.

We also believe that all forms of knowledge are fluid, dynamic, and interactive. The presence or activation of one form of knowledge can directly or indirectly influence other forms of knowledge (Alexander, Schallert, and Hare, 1991). Research compiled by Alexander, Schallert and Hare (1991) has determined that the interactive sphere of knowledge, including sociocultural and tacit knowledge can be divided into two planes, conceptual and metacognitive knowledge. Knowledge that relates to an individual's knowledge of ideas, or concepts can be viewed as conceptual knowledge. Conceptual knowledge encases both content knowledge and discourse knowledge, which can be broken down into several planes due to the dynamic nature of knowledge. Content knowledge, which is defined as formal and informal knowledge of some aspect of one's physical, social, or mental world encases other forms of knowledge such as: domain knowledge (the realm of knowledge that broadly encompasses a field of study or thought); discipline knowledge (the knowledge of a specialized field and specific academic area). The other type of knowledge included in conceptual knowledge is discourse knowledge, which is the knowledge of language and its uses. Discourse knowledge also includes text structure knowledge (the conception of how large units of language are combined or related); syntactic knowledge (how words can be combined to convey meaning at the sentence level); and rhetorical knowledge (sense of audience and style). As students acquire the conceptual knowledge of their chosen field, they will develop an understanding of philosophy, theory, and instructional techniques that will set the foundation for higher learning.

Specifically, professional educator candidates need a broad comprehensive and integrated understanding of the contemporary world in which they teach. They should also possess deep knowledge of the subjects they teach (Shulman, 1987; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). This deep understanding of subject matter knowledge for teaching is referred to as pedagogical content knowledge and includes the ability to anticipate and respond to typical student patterns of understanding and misunderstanding within a content area. Pedagogical Content knowledge also includes the teacher’s ability to provide numerous examples and non-examples in order to make the content accessible to all learners (Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee, 2005). In order for teachers to make content accessible to students, they must first inspire learners with a desire to want to learn more about the subject matter. Teachers must get to know and understand their learners and their learners’ interests in order to get students to engage and persist in the learning process. While the research on content knowledge does not indicate that teacher candidates need to hold a degree in the content they plan to teach (Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee, 2005), they must have a solid foundation in the subject matters they plan to teach and the desire and inspiration to continue to be life-long learners in these subjects and continue to enhance their knowledge of the subject matter content throughout their careers. In order to be an effective teacher, the candidate must understand the relationship between the content knowledge and the pedagogical choices and curricular decisions they make that help facilitate student learning. We base our beliefs on pedagogical content knowledge on Schulman, (1986) when he states:

The most regularly taught topics in one’s subject area, the most useful forms of representations of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations – in a word, ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult; the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons (pp. 9-10).

In order for students of the 21st Century to be successful and competitive in the world economy they are not only going to need to develop a thorough understanding of content, but are also going to need to learn how to best develop this understanding through, perseverance, collaboration, inquiry, critical problem solving and developing creative solutions to complex ideas. Professional educators and school support personnel are going to need to build on their disciplinary knowledge and make ongoing connections to recent findings and complexities about learner development and ways in which 21st century learners acquire knowledge and understanding.

At the undergraduate level, we feel that to become inspired educators who will engage in the community and transform the future candidates must develop a solid foundation in specialty area pedagogical knowledge. Our undergraduate candidates at WCU complete this expectation through a solid general education liberal arts background, as well as a concentration in areas across the arts and sciences and fine and performing arts. In addition to these cross college connections, candidates continue to explore pedagogical content knowledge throughout their course work in the College of Education and Allied Professions. These collaborative efforts across multiple colleges allow our pre-service and in-service professional candidates to complete content area course work that aligns with both state level standards of professionals (i.e. North Carolina Essential Standards and the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards) as well as national professional standards (The Common Core State Standards, the American Association of School Administrators, American School Counselor Association, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and various other specialized professional organizations).

We expect graduate students to possess strong knowledge bases and think critically about how to apply their knowledge in real-life situations as they transition into leadership roles in the schools and communities. We also support graduate students in their leadership within professional organizations as they apply this knowledge in meaningful ways that have a large impact within their specific discipline.

In order for our candidates to inspire and enhance learners' knowledge of social, cultural, ethical and physical worlds in which they live, our candidates must have a strong command of their conceptual knowledge. They must understand not only the specialized content, which they teach but must also understand the organizing features and the ways in which knowledge is created.

Western Carolina University has identified several thematic areas, which address the professional development of conceptual knowledge: 1) Liberal Education, 2) Inquiry Skills, 3) Experiential Learning, 4) Ongoing Professional Development, 5) Specialty Area Competency, 6) Utilization of Modern Technology and Resources and 7) Human Growth and Development Perspectives.

Pedagogical knowledge revolves around the term strategic knowledge, which refers to intentional actions, selected to achieve specific goals. Strategies are used to execute and accomplish the learning process. Strategic knowledge includes reflective deliberation on learning. Specifically, pedagogical knowledge will be applied to the goal setting as well as procedures and instruction that will be implemented in the classroom (Alexander & Judy 1988).

Knowledge is complex. Acquisition of knowledge is a process of building constructs. There are multiple ways of knowing, and multiple ways of evaluating processes and outcomes. Evaluation is a critical component of all aspects of teaching and learning. Just as knowledge is domain and content, it is also dynamic and interactive (Alexander, Schallert and Hare, 1991). Therefore, reflection/evaluation combines conceptual and pedagogical knowledge. Our goal is to facilitate candidates' ability to become critically reflective practitioners through knowledge of diverse evaluative tools, techniques and processes.

Just as knowledge is a discovery process empowering and inspiring learners through exercise of intelligence (Gardner, 1983), discussion promotes and affects attitudes for a wide spectrum of student outcomes. Future teachers and educational leaders should be aware of and use multiple and alternative means of assessing and evaluating student outcomes in ways that are performance based, continuous, responsive, and authentic.

Reflective practice has been an essential component of practice and professional development among educators for decades. In 1977, Van Manen proposed a three-tiered reflection model to identify stages of thought. In order to reach the highest level, known as critical reflection, Van Manen argued educators must think critically and view the impact of their practices through moral, contextual, and social lenses. Similarly, Schön (1987) identified levels of reflective activity, in which he emphasized the importance of practitioners reflecting *in action* as well as *on action.* In Shulman’s (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning, reflection is one of six key areas of pedagogy, with the others being evaluation, instruction, transformation, comprehension, and new comprehension.

While it takes skill and extensive practice to reach high levels of reflectivity, we promote the development of a strong foundation for reflective practice that cultivates as students progress through and complete our programs. Engaging in reflective practice encourages students to be transformative leaders, as they ultimately obtain deep levels of understanding about themselves, their beliefs, and their understanding of how their decisions impact others. Daley (2002) suggested one key element that influences adult learning within professional practice is *allegiance to the profession*. As our inspired candidates progress toward using more reflective thinking, they develop an allegiance and civic engagement that transforms individuals, families, schools, and communities. We believe in challenging students to develop new ways of thinking and being within the context of practical, real-life situations, while maintaining full commitment to their field of study.

In the 21st Century, being a reflective practitioner is an even more pressing issue as cultural competence emerges from mindful self-reflection and identification of personal biases, prejudices, and assumptions (Dray & Wisneski, 2011). Educational settings are more diverse than ever before and the geographical constraints that keep us isolated are becoming obsolete, particularly through the use of technology. As a result, we want our students to identify and reflect on their beliefs and prior experiences (Hanrahan & Tate, 2001; Lee, 2010; Long & Stuart, 2004). These beliefs, in conjunction with acquired knowledge, influence candidates’ decision-making and professional practice (Carrington, Deppeler, & Moss, 2010). Becoming aware of personal beliefs is challenging since they are formed over time and deeply rooted in childhood experiences (Lortie, 1975). Yet, through this increased awareness, there is potential for students’ beliefs about knowing and learning to change or transform, thus improving their professional practice (Brownlee, 2004; Bowman, 1989). Particularly, we provide our candidates with opportunities to understand and come to know the influence of prior experiences on their present learning so their awareness contributes to an ability to judge what is relevant versus what is tangential.

Even though reflection remains a key tenet of higher education programs, collaboration and joint meaning-making should accompany this reflection (McArdle & Coutts, 2010). Through collaboration, our candidates are able to develop professional identities supported by reflexivity, discourse, and the emergence of innovative ideas and practices (Shulman, 1987). Additionally, they can learn to adjust their educational strategies to mirror collective views of quality, develop more positive views of students, and create shared understandings of how to analyze student work (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). As our candidates enter educational fields, we feel they are prepared to engage in similar collaborative endeavors within professional learning communities and ultimately transform the future of education.

Western Carolina’s recent Carnegie classification as an **engaged** university endorses WCU’s recent institutional focus on engaged learning. The integration of activities in and out of the classroom by candidates who are actively involved in and responsible for their own learning are key aspects to becoming more engaged in the community. Engaged learning is a critical part of the Western Carolina University’s Quality Enhancement Plan (or QEP), a major component of the process of obtaining reaccreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. It also is an ingredient of WCU’s service learning program, which enhances students’ academic development while fostering social and civic responsibility. Western Carolina is fully committed to stewardship of place and the Conceptual Framework Committee quickly identified candidate engagement as a unique strength of Western Carolina graduates.

At WCU, we define engaged learning as the integration of purposeful academic and co-curricular activities that equip our candidates with the intellectual and experiential skills necessary for success in life beyond college. Engaged learning incorporates teaching, learning, and scholarship by faculty, students, and community partners characterized by reciprocity and respectful exchange.

At WCU, we define community outreach and engagement as the alignment and application of University goals and resources to local and regional issues through the development of reciprocal, collaborative partnerships and exchanges, which are critical components of Stewardship of Place. Community outreach and engagement include the exploration and application of knowledge, information, and resources.

In recent years, researchers have formed a strong consensus on the importance of engaged learning in schools and classrooms. This consensus, together with recognition of the changing needs of the 21st century, has stimulated the development of specific indicators of engaged learning. Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, and Rasmussen (1994) developed the indicators described below. These indicators of engaged learning can act as a "compass" for reform instruction, helping educators chart an instructional course and maintain an orientation based on a vision of engaged learning and what it looks like in the classroom and community.

**1. Indicator: Vision of Engaged Learning**

What does engaged learning look like? Successful, engaged learners are responsible for their own learning. These students are self-regulated and able to define their own learning goals and evaluate their own achievement. They are also energized by their learning; their joy of learning leads to a lifelong passion for solving problems, understanding, and taking the next step in their thinking. These learners are strategic in that they know how to learn and are able to transfer knowledge to solve problems creatively. Engaged learning also involves being collaborative--that is, valuing and having the skills to work with others.

**2. Indicator: Tasks for Engaged Learning**

In order to have engaged learning, tasks need to be challenging, authentic, and multidisciplinary. Such tasks are typically complex and involve sustained amounts of time. They are authentic in that they correspond to the tasks in the home and workplaces of today and tomorrow. Collaboration around authentic tasks often takes place with peers and mentors within school as well as with family members and others in the real world outside of school. These tasks often require integrated instruction that incorporates problem-based learning and curriculum by project.

**3. Indicator: Assessment of Engaged Learning**

Assessment of engaged learning involves presenting candidates with an authentic task, project, or investigation, and then observing, interviewing, and examining their presentations and artifacts to assess what they actually know and can do. This assessment, often called performance-based assessment, is generative in that it involves candidates in generating their own performance criteria and playing a key role in the overall design, evaluation, and reporting of their assessment. The best performance-based assessment has a seamless connection to curriculum and instruction so that it is ongoing. Assessment should represent all meaningful aspects of performance and should have equitable standards that apply to all students.

**4. Indicator: Instructional Models & Strategies for Engaged Learning**

The most powerful models of instruction are interactive. Instruction actively engages the learner, and is generative. Instruction encourages the learner to construct and produce knowledge in meaningful ways. Our candidates teach others interactively and interact generatively with their instructor and peers. This allows for co-construction of knowledge, which promotes engaged learning that is problem-, project-, and goal-based. Some common strategies included in engaged learning models of instruction are individual and group summarizing, means of exploring multiple perspectives, techniques for building upon prior knowledge, brainstorming, Socratic dialogue, problem-solving processes, and team teaching.

**5. Indicator: Learning Context of Engaged Learning**

For engaged learning to happen, the learning environment must be conceived of as a knowledge-building learning community that extends beyond the classroom. Such communities not only develop shared understandings collaboratively but also create empathetic learning environments that value diversity and multiple perspectives. These communities search for strategies to build on the strengths of all of its members. Truly collaborative classrooms, schools, and communities encourage students to ask hard questions, define problems, lead conversations, set goals, have work-related conversations with family members and other adults in and out of school, and engage in entrepreneurial activities.

**6. Indicator: Grouping for Engaged Learning**

Collaborative work that is learning-centered often involves small groups or teams of two or more candidates within a classroom or across classroom boundaries. Heterogeneous groups (including different genders, cultures, abilities, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds) offer a wealth of background knowledge and perspectives to different tasks. Flexible grouping, which allows teachers to reconfigure small groups according to the purposes of instruction and incorporates frequent heterogeneous groups, is one of the most equitable means of grouping and ensuring increased learning opportunities.

**7. Indicator: Teacher Roles for Engaged Learning**

The role of the teacher in the classroom has shifted from the primary role of information giver to that of facilitator, guide, and learner. As a facilitator, the teacher provides the rich environments and learning experiences needed for collaborative study. The teacher also is required to act as a guide--a role that incorporates mediation, modeling, and coaching. Often the teacher also is a co-learner and co-investigator with the students.

**8. Indicator: Student Roles for Engaged Learning**

One important candidate role is that of explorer. Interaction with the physical world and with other people allows candidates to discover concepts and apply skills. Candidates are then encouraged to reflect upon their discoveries, which is essential for the candidate as a cognitive apprentice. Apprenticeship takes place when candidates observe and apply the thinking processes used by practitioners. Candidates transform into teachers themselves by integrating what they've learned. Hence, they become producers of knowledge, capable of making significant contributions to the world's knowledge.

As the College of Education and Allied Professions continues to examine our own values and conceptual framework, we aspire to have candidates who inspire themselves, engage in the community and region, and strive to transform the future. In order to aspire to such greatness our candidates need to become leaders in our future. These engaged leaders who strive to transform and make a difference in the future must be committed to advocacy, collaboration, creative problem solving, and inquiry. These future leaders must develop strong conceptual, pedagogical knowledge and reflective knowledge in order to better connect with and assist others.

As noted previously, Western Carolina candidates are committed to reflection and self-awareness and are able to effectively use their intelligence, self confidence, determination, sociability and integrity along with the skills of problem solving, social judgment and content knowledge to become leaders and agents for necessary change (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs & Fleishman, 2000; Northouse, 2010). Effective leaders are reflective practitioners who learn from their experiences and strive for continuous growth and understanding of their impact in their educational setting.

Candidates of Western Carolina University are expected to enter their chosen educational careers ready to be leaders. The need for strong educational leaders extends beyond administrators who hold formal leadership positions and into other school personnel such as teachers, counselors, and school psychologists who need to lead in less formal ways. The professional educators of Western Carolina University strive for excellence in all phases of their lives. Regardless of their selected professional education path, our candidates will have multiple leadership opportunities through their engagement with the community and region. As leadership opportunities arise our candidates will strive to create opportunities for the mutual benefit of all involved and will promote positive change throughout their lives, organizations, and communities.

While research on leadership began in the field of business (Barker, 2001), research has begun to focus more specifically on leadership within various educational careers (English, 2005). Inspiring, engaging, and transforming require a unique blend of virtues, knowledge, and experience. Educational leaders recognize that change begins with the leader (Quinn, Speitzer, & Brown, 2000) and entails a strong commitment to democratic processes (Gross, 2006). Leader preparation at WCU emphasizes leadership as a change process (Hall & Hord, 2006) and a relational process (Sergiovanni, 1990) steeped in caring (Noddings, ; Mayeroff, 1995), authenticity (Starratt, 2004), and critique (Starratt, 1991).

Layton (2005) studied special educational needs coordinators and found that a lack of power and status kept them from being able to take on a more significant leadership role in schools. Dollarhide, Gibson, & Sagninak (2008) noted that the ASCA model has identified leadership as a core theme for the work of school counselors. They found that school counselors who demonstrated strong leadership skills a) have a clear sense of responsibility for bringing out program improvements in the face of challenges, b) have clear and focused goals for change, and c.) have favorable external conditions (e.g., freedom to define their roles in the school, administrative support). In addition, barriers to leadership were identified as the resistance of others to their ideas, fear of failure, and worry that they were not ready to lead. Shriberg, Satchwell, McArdle, and James (2010) noted that leadership skills are also an important component of the standards for school psychologists as outlined in the NASP (National Association of School Psychologists) Practice Model. This research showed that effective school psychology leaders are viewed as being competent, knowledgeable, and possessing strong interpersonal skills and personal character. These leadership skills need to be implemented across many domains of practice.

Western Carolina’s education program envisions developing competent professionals who not only have a deep knowledge of their field but who also feel empowered to bring about substantive change. In order for our candidates to become leaders who are prepared to transform the future it is important to realize that good teaching requires knowing and valuing each student as an individual, as family members, and as members of a social group. Our candidates must understand the differences and similarities among individuals and groups of people based on age, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, learning styles, abilities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic area (Nieto, 2000). Our candidates will graduate prepared for active leadership in seeking educational equity for all learners. One avenue for developing such transformational educators is helping them develop a social justice perspective. Educators who approach the profession from a social justice perspective believe that *all* students have a right to a quality education (Tate, 2001). Those who work for social justice are action-oriented, view themselves as responsible for student learning, and are advocates for their students (Larabee & Moorehead, 2010). Advocates of social justice move beyond tolerance and appreciation of diversity and work to address systematic inequalities (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2010). We recognize the importance of social justice in addressing such major educational issues as the pervasive achievement gap between low-income, minority students and white middle-to-high income students (Haycock, 2001; Williams, 2003), the lack of resources and quality education in many low-income communities (Kozol, 1991; Rothstein, 2004), and the overrepresentation of minorities in special education classes (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

One practice affiliated with social justice is that of culturally responsive teaching (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teaching is built on the theory that the disparities between the home-culture of low-income and minority students and the school culture are a major factor in low academic achievement of these groups (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive educators embrace the history and experiences of the students with whom they work and assist these students in understanding the contexts in which they live (Frederick, Cave, & Perencevich, 2009). Helping candidates understand culturally responsive teaching prepares them to meet the needs of diverse learners, including those from traditionally marginalized populations.

Transformational learning (TL) is both a process and an outcome. TL seeks to effect a “change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) in adult learners. The process of TL may utilize a variety of modalities, but it rests firmly on creating safe collaborative learning communities (Daloz, 2000). Transformational Learners become aware of their own critical assumptions, engage in activities that foster an examination of these assumptions by moving, “in and out of the cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social” (Grabove, 1997). Engaged and experiential learning and a “mentoring community” (Daloz, 2000, p. 112) are critical elements of TL. The process of transformational learning is valuable for both faulty and university students and is an essential part of gaining insight into one’s self and profession, and to developing the necessary skills to transform the world around us.

***Inspire, Engage, Transform: Ourselves, Our Community, Our Future***

**Candidate Proficiencies**

The Conceptual Framework for Professional Education Programs at Western Carolina University provides the vision, rationale, and knowledge base for identifying the proficiencies that our graduates will demonstrate. In ensuring the goal that graduates of our professional education programs will be inspired learners, engaged in the community and prepared to transform the future of 21st Century learning, our programs are structured to provide both initial and advanced candidates with multiple opportunities during coursework, early field experiences, internships and clinical practices to develop into **inspired**, **engaged** learners who are prepared to **transform** the future.

**Core Proficiency: Inspired**

Candidates will demonstrate that they are inspired learners as they engage in the acquisition and development of knowledge which will enable them to become more engaged in the community and prepared to transform the future lives of children, youth, families and others in the workplace.

I1: Global Knowledge that leads to civic engagement and becoming well educated, healthy global citizens

I2: Specialty area and content knowledge

I3: Pedagogical Knowledge

I4: Knowledge of learners and their contexts

I5: Reflective Knowledge

I6: Research based practice

**Core Proficiency: Engaged**

E1: Authentic multi-disciplinary tasks

E2: Interactive problems, projects, and goal-based learning

E3: Collaborative classrooms, schools, and communities solving problems

E4: Facilitator of rich learning experiences

E5: Inquiry-based learning

E6: Modeling & coaching

**Core Proficiency: Transformative**

T1: Reflective self-awareness

T2: Continuous growth

T3: Promotion of positive change

T4: Sense of responsibility

T5: Focused goals

T6: Strong interpersonal and character

The candidate core proficiencies of **inspiring**, **engaging** and **transforming** are fully aligned with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, and standards for school leaders, and school psychologists and counselors, including the teacher education specialty area standards. Candidates are expected to meet North Carolina standards at the proficient level, which is performance level 3 of 4. North Carolina professional educator standards have been reviewed by the appropriate specialized professional associations (SPAs) and found to be aligned with national professional standards.

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| **Alignment of the Conceptual Framework with North Carolina Professional Standards for Teachers, School Executives, School Psychologists and School Counselors** | | | | | |
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**APPENDIX A**

**Old Conceptual Framework:**

**A community of learners guided by Knowledge, Values, and Experiences.**

The following statements reflect the goals we have for Western Carolina University students during the course of their education programs. In collaboration with our B-12 partners in the region providing quality field experiences, our programs are designed to foster the development of these dispositions, knowledge and skills.

We teach our students to use their knowledge of both human development and their disciplines to effectively teach all pupils to solve problems. Appropriate values and dispositions are central to excellent teaching. We model collaborative, caring, and intellectually stimulating learning communities so our teacher education students will create environments for all their students that encourage curiosity, foster motivation, and promote achievement of rigorous state and professional standards. We require our candidates to use state-of-the-art technology in their courses and in their field experiences.

Our vision is for candidates who are passionate, lifelong learners, who genuinely care about all students, who understand human development, who have a deep knowledge of their disciplines, who have an effective range of instructional skills including a facility with technology, and who expect and support high achievement in their students. This vision is shared, articulated, and supported throughout the curriculum, in clinical experiences, and in the formative and summative assessments.

Knowledge and Skills: Candidates learn to use their knowledge of human development and their subject matter to effectively teach all pupils to solve problems.

Candidates learn to:

* Know the subjects they teach
* Know how to teach their subjects
* Communicate effectively
* Understand and use the knowledge bases for multicultural education
* Integrate current technology into their instructional repertoire
* Understand development in children and adolescents
* Effectively organize and manage groups of students or clients
* Be proficient at solving problems
* Practice critical, independent, reflective thinking
* Use informal and formal assessment strategies appropriately
* Demonstrate professional responsibility
* Become instructional leaders
* Foster connections between schools and home, family, and community

Values and Dispositions: We attempt to foster the following values and dispositions in education candidates to ensure that all students learn.

We encourage candidates to:

* Value individual differences and demonstrate commitment to the achievement of all students
* Know and practice professional standards of integrity
* Be passionate and enthusiastic about teaching and learning
* Take initiative and have a strong sense of efficacy
* Be lifelong learners
* Strive for quality

Experience: We provide multiple, substantial, and varied experiences in schools so that candidates will have a strong base for understanding the theories and the practices to enhance all students’ learning.

We require our students to:

* Learn through field-based experiences such as observations and internships
* Systematically reflect on practice
* Draw on their own life experiences, and reflect on the impact of culture on learning in diverse settings
* Help their students connect life experiences to new learning
* Use a variety of available technological resources and use their skills to increase the technology skills of their students and other school professionals